

COTE D'IVOIRE 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent religious leaders made concerted efforts to promote religious tolerance and encourage interfaith dialogue.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government. Embassy officials engaged with local religious and civil society leaders regularly throughout the year and organized events to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 22.4 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 35 to 40 percent of the population is Muslim, a roughly equal percentage is Christian, and an estimated 25 percent adheres to indigenous religious beliefs. Many Christians and Muslims also adhere to some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs.

Traditionally, the north is associated with Islam and the south with Christianity, although adherents of both religious groups live throughout the country. In general, political and religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic lines.

Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Harrists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Southern Baptists, Copts, adherents of the Celestial Church of Christ, and members of the Assemblies of God. Muslim groups include Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadiyya. Other religious groups include Buddhists, Bahais, followers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Bossonists, who follow traditions of the Akan ethnic group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The Ministry of Interior's (MOI) Department of Faith-Based Organizations is responsible for promoting religious freedom in the country.

The law requires all religious groups to register with the government. Groups must submit an application to the Department of Faith-Based Organizations. The application must include the group's bylaws, names of the founding members and board members, date of founding, and general assembly minutes. The department investigates the organization with the aim of ensuring that the group has no members or purpose it deems to be politically subversive.

Government Practices

The government continued to fund and organize Hajj pilgrimages for Muslims and pilgrimages to Israel and the Palestinian Territories and Lourdes for Christians. Adherents of these religious groups applied to the MOI, which determined which individuals would be sponsored based on criteria including age, health, ability to obtain a visa, and involvement in their local religious community.

The government reportedly provided equal access to state-run television and radio for religious programming.

The government included prominent Muslim and Catholic religious leaders in reconciliation efforts. The country's acknowledged Muslim leader, Sheikh Boikary Fofana, and Catholic Archbishop Paul-Simeon Ahouana, along with other religious leaders, continued to serve as active members of the Dialogue, Truth, and Reconciliation Commission.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Muslim and Christian leaders organized public interfaith activities and issued joint statements to promote national reconciliation and tolerance. In March religious leaders launched "The Days of Prayer," a period dedicated to prayer for repentance, reconciliation, and unity in the wake of the 2010-2011 post-electoral

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crisis. Imam Fofana and Methodist Bishop Benjamin Boni made speeches about national unity at the event.

In September an evangelical parish in Abidjan celebrated its harvest festival by sharing a feast with several religious leaders including Catholics, Pentecostals, and Muslims.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials met regularly with local religious and civil society leaders to discuss religious freedom and tolerance. On July 16, the Ambassador hosted an iftar for approximately 50 Muslim community leaders and others, during which his remarks emphasized religious freedom and tolerance. In August the embassy facilitated an agreement between Voice of America (VOA) and Al-Bayane Radio, an Islamic radio station based in Abidjan. The agreement allowed VOA's *"Dialogue des Religions"* to be broadcast weekly on Al-Bayane Radio, reaching millions of listeners across the country. *"Dialogue des Religions"* is an interactive program featuring unaffiliated host and guests – often religious scholars or journalists – who discuss religious issues in the news and answer listeners' questions on various facets of religion. On October 26, the embassy commemorated Daniel Pearl World Music Days by hosting a concert that featured musical groups of different faiths, including Islam and Christianity.